

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A hydraulically switchable distribution valve for shield supports in underground mining, comprising:

a high pressure port, a load port, a return port, and a control pressure port for hydraulic fluid;

a valve piston, axially displaceable in a location hole of a valve seat mounting, which at its open end face is connected to the load port, which comprises a radial aperture and which when in contact with a sealing seat on the valve seat mounting side blocks off the load port from the high pressure port;

a control piston in a control piston guide, which can be displaced by means of a force exerted by a control pressure at the control pressure port, by means of which the return port, as a function of the position of the control piston, can be connected with the load port or can be blocked off from the load port and the high pressure port, wherein the control piston is free to move relative to the valve piston from its initial position up to its intermediate position, and travels from the intermediate position to the end position coupled with the valve piston, and further wherein the valve piston comprises a second radial aperture, displaced towards the end face relative to the first radial aperture, and that the first radial aperture can be closed by the control piston with the arrival of the control piston at an intermediate position between an initial position and an end position wherein the valve piston is guided in a valve piston sliding guide with the formation of a throttling clearance and wherein the second radial aperture, as a function of the location of the valve piston, lies opposite to the valve piston sliding guide or lies on the high pressure side of the valve piston sliding guide.

2-3. (Cancelled).

4. (Currently Amended) The distribution valve of Claim [[2]] 1, wherein the throttling clearance, when the control piston is positioned in the intermediate position with contact between the valve piston and the sealing seat, forms a restricted fluid connection between the load port and the return port, and with an opened sealing seat forms a restricted fluid connection between the high pressure port and the return port.

5. (Currently Amended) The distribution valve of claim Claim 1, wherein the load port in the initial position of the control piston is connected with the return port via the first radial aperture, and in that the control piston in its end position closes off the return port, where the second radial aperture completely unblocks the fluid connection between the high pressure port and the load port.

6. (Cancelled).

7. (Currently Amended) [[The]] A hydraulically switchable distribution valve of Claim 1 for shield supports in underground mining, comprising:

a high pressure port, a load port, a return port, and a control pressure port for hydraulic fluid;

a valve piston, axially displaceable in a location hole of a valve seat mounting, which at its open end face is connected to the load port, which comprises a radial aperture and which when in contact with a sealing seat on the valve seat mounting side blocks off the load port from the high pressure port;

a control piston in a control piston guide, which can be displaced by means of a force exerted by a control pressure at the control pressure port, by means of which the return port, as a function of the position of the control piston, can be connected with the load port or can be blocked off from the load port and the high pressure port, wherein the control piston is free to move relative to the valve piston from its initial position up to its intermediate position, and travels from the intermediate position to the end position coupled with the valve piston, and further wherein the valve piston comprises a second radial aperture, displaced towards the end face relative to the first radial aperture, and that the first radial aperture can be closed by the control piston with the arrival of the

control piston at an intermediate position between an initial position and an end position, wherein the control piston at its end face facing the control pressure port comprises an inward-facing flange, which in the intermediate position of the control piston comes into contact with a shoulder section of the valve piston.

8. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 1, wherein the valve piston is fitted with a valve cone and that a sealing ring with a cone surface provided for the sealing seat is located on the valve seat mounting.

9. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 8, wherein the sealing ring is fixed in the valve seat mounting by means of a retention ring and wherein the retention ring with its interior wall surface forms the valve piston sliding guide.

10. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 8, wherein the valve piston on its outer wall surface comprises a cone face ring, on the bottom surface of which is provided the valve cone, the cone face ring being located on the high pressure side of the second radial aperture.

11. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 1, wherein the valve piston on its outer wall surface comprises a cone face ring, on the bottom surface of which is provided the valve cone, the cone face ring being located on the high pressure side of the second radial aperture.

12. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 9, wherein the control piston comprises a control piston shaft, that in the intermediate and end positions of the control piston overlaps the first radial aperture so as to sealedly overlap it or overlap the latter while leaving a throttle clearance.

13. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 12, wherein a sealing seat element is located in the valve seat mounting on which, in the end position

of the control piston, a forward end of the control piston shaft comes into sealing contact.

14. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 13, wherein the retention ring and the sealing seat element are formed in one piece and/or that the valve seat mounting comprises a stepped location section in which the sealing ring and the retention ring are clamped in a form fit manner.

15. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 12, wherein the retention ring surrounds the sealing ring on the side facing away from the piston sealing face with an inward chamfered ring mounting in a form fit manner.

16. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 9, wherein the sealing ring is manufactured from a plastic and the retention ring is manufactured from a steel.

17. (Cancelled).

18. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 9, wherein a closing spring located in the valve seat mounting acts together with the valve piston such that the valve cone is clamped against the sealing ring.

19. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 18, wherein the first radial aperture and the second radial aperture are configured as a radial hole and the radial apertures consist of a number of radial holes, preferably four, located around the circumference and spaced apart from each other.

20. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 1, wherein the valve piston is axially secured in the valve seat mounting with a snap ring.

21. (Previously Presented) The distribution valve of Claim 1, wherein the valve piston comprises on its closed face opposite to the open end face a connecting thread for connection of a disassembly tool.

22. (Previously Presented) A hydraulically switchable distribution valve, comprising:

a high pressure port, a load port, a return port, and a control pressure port for hydraulic fluid;

a sleeve-type valve piston disposed in a valve seat mounting and axially moveable relative to said valve seat mounting, said valve piston having an open end face fluidly connected to said load port and a first radial aperture defined in a sidewall of said valve piston, said valve piston preventing fluid communication between said load port and said high pressure port when said valve piston is in a first position wherein said valve piston is in contact with a sealing seat of said valve seat mounting; and

a control piston disposed in a control piston guide and axially displaceable relative to said control piston guide, said control piston axially movable by a control pressure received from said control pressure port, said control piston movable between an initial position and an end position, said load port in unrestricted fluid communication with said return port through said first radial aperture when said control piston is in said initial position and said control piston substantially preventing fluid communication between said load port and said return port through said first radial aperture when said control piston is in said end position;

wherein a second radial aperture is defined in said sidewall of said valve piston, said second radial aperture spaced axially apart from said first radial aperture in a direction toward said end face, said first radial aperture closed by said control piston when said control piston is in an intermediate position between said first initial position and second said end position[[s]] to restrict fluid communication through said first radial aperture wherein the control piston at its end face facing the control pressure port comprises an inward-facing flange, which in the intermediate position of the control piston comes into contact with a shoulder section of the valve piston.

23. (Previously Presented) The hydraulically switchable distribution valve of claim 22, wherein said high pressure port is in fluid communication with said load port through said second radial aperture when said valve piston is in a second position.

24. (Previously Presented) The hydraulically switchable distribution valve of claim 23, wherein said load port is in limited fluid communication with said return port through a restricted fluid connection when said control piston is in said intermediate position.

25. (Previously Presented) The hydraulically switchable distribution valve of claim 24, wherein said restricted fluid connection is formed by a narrow clearance between said sidewall of said valve piston and a valve piston sliding guide.